

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1           1.       A method for using a voice-messaging system to place local and long-  
2 distance telephone calls, comprising  
3           a voice-messaging system receiving a call placed by a user;  
4           verifying that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;  
5           receiving from the user a request to place a telephone call;  
6           receiving from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to  
7 be called; and  
8           placing a telephone call to the third-party telephone line associated with the  
9 third-party telephone number entered by the user.

1           2.       The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising the step of  
2 connecting the telephone call to the third-party telephone line if the third-party telephone line  
3 is available.

1           3.       The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the step of receiving a call  
2 placed by a user comprises receiving a toll-free call from the user.

1           4.       The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the step of verifying that the  
2 user is a valid user comprises receiving and verifying a user-identification code and a  
3 password code.

1           5.       The method as recited in claim 4, wherein the step of receiving a  
2 telephone number comprises receiving a long-distance telephone number to be called.

1           6.       The method as recited in claim 5, wherein the user-identification code  
2 is associated with a billing account, and wherein the charges for the long-distance call are  
3 charged to the billing account.

1           7.       The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system  
2 allows the user to choose between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

1           8.       The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system  
2 directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu if a third-party-call connection is not  
3 established.

1           9.       The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system  
2 directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined  
3 signal at any step during the process of placing a call to a third party.

1           10.      The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the step of connecting the  
2 telephone call to the third-party number comprises establishing a 3-way call between the user,  
3 the voice-messaging system and the third-party telephone line.

1           11.      The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the step of connecting the  
2 telephone call to the third-party number comprises:  
3                establishing a direct connection between the user and the third-party telephone  
4 line; and  
5                disconnecting the voice-messaging system from the call.

1           12.      The method as recited in claim 10, further comprising:  
2                during or after the call between the user and the third party, receiving a pre-  
3 defined signal from the user; and  
4                transferring the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu.

1           13.      An article of manufacture, comprising:  
2                a computer-usable medium having a computer-readable program-code means  
3 embodied therein for causing a voice-messaging system to place local and long-distance  
4 telephone calls, the computer-readable program-code means in said article of manufacture  
5 comprising;

6                    computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a  
7 call placed by a user;

8                    computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify  
9 that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;

10                   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive  
11 from the user a request to place a telephone call;

12                   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive  
13 from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called; and

14                   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to place a  
15 telephone call to the third-party telephone line associated with the third-party  
16 telephone number entered by the user.

1           14.     The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising  
2 computer-readable program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party  
3 telephone line via the telephone call if the third-party telephone line is available.

1           15.     The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, wherein the  
2 computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify that the user is a valid  
3 user comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive and  
4 verify a user-identification code and a password code.

1           16.     The article of manufacture as recited in claim 15, wherein the  
2 computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a telephone number  
3 comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a long-  
4 distance telephone number to be called.

1           17.     The article of manufacture as recited in claim 16, wherein the user-  
2 identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein charges for the long-  
3 distance call are charged to the billing account.

1           18.     The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising  
2 computer-readable program means for causing a computer to provide the user a choice  
3 between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

1           19.     The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising  
2 computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-  
3 messaging-system menu if a third-party call connection is not established.

1           20.     The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising  
2 computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-  
3 messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined signal at any step during the  
4 process of placing a call to a third party.

1           21.     The article of manufacture as recited in claim 14, wherein the  
2 computer-readable program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party  
3 telephone line via the telephone call comprises computer-readable program means for  
4 causing a computer to establish a three-way call between the user, the voice-messaging  
5 system and the third-party telephone line.

1                   22.     The article of manufacture of claim 14, wherein the computer-readable  
2 program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party telephone line via  
3 the telephone line comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to  
4 establish a direct connection between the user and the third-party telephone line; and  
5                   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to disconnect the  
6 voice messaging system from the call.

1                   23.     The article of manufacture as recited in claim 21, further comprising  
2 computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a pre-defined signal  
3 from the user during or after the call between the user and the third party; and  
4                   computer-readable program means for causing a computer to transfer the user  
5 back to a voice-messaging-system menu.